More Than Prayers Needed To Save Hyderabad From Going The Bengaluru Way

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Hyderabad, the city that dwells between a magnificent past and a futuristic present, has left behind all the Indian cities in terms of quality of life the residents have.

In March this year, the 'Mercer's Quality of Living Report', for the second consecutive time put Hyderabad as top. This list ranks all the world cities and Hyderabad's was ranked 139 among them. However, there are fears about the sustainability of the city if one studies the case of another south Indian city Bengaluru.

In 2012, Bengaluru topped the same index of Indian cities at the same rank (139).

Things have become a downward spiral for Bengaluru that had led to the city being ranked 145 in this year's list after constantly being in the news for toxic lakes, depleting underground water reserves and more recently the Cauvery river dispute.

The primary reason for Bengaluru's condition is unsustainable development programmes and lack of management of existing resources.

According to a study released by the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru will become unlivable in five years because of unplanned growth. According to the findings of Prof TV Ramachandra and Dr Bharath H Aithal, who prepared the study, "There has been a 525 per cent growth in built-up area in the last four decades, 78 per cent decline in vegetation, and 79 per cent decline in water bodies."

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In an interview to the *Deccan Herald*, Ramachandra said: "It's disturbing to see private developers dominate government decisions. The norm to keep at least 15-20 per cent of the city as open space is ignored, storm water drains and water bodies have been narrowed. At least now, the government should wake up and get its priorities right to make Bengaluru a sustainable city."

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According to some estimates, it is believed that the 'Garden City' had 261 lakes in 1961, which came down to around 80 by the mid-1980s.

Less than 25 lakes remain in Bengaluru today.

Now, it seems that the "most livable city" of India is headed down the same path. The Forest Department has cleared the felling of close to 5,000 trees around Hyderabad to make way for the project which envisages to provide drinking water.

Apart from the 4,995 trees, 1,332 bamboos will also be felled.

"Like many big cities, Hyderabad has become unsustainable in many ways, be it water, waste management, transport or energy resources and consumption," says a report in *The Frontier Weekly*.

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"The city's power consumption was earlier estimated to increase at the rate of 10% per annum, but in recent years, the figure has been 18 per cent. Rapid urbanization in Hyderabad had already caused a certain level of systemic unsustain-ability, which is quite palpable in the city's shortfall of urban infrastructure. If the trend continues at the current pace, the system will undergo enormous stress.

Hyderabad's current shortfall in basic urban infrastructure like transportation, water supplies and waste management must be made up for through purposeful reform."